



CHARLES THATCHER—WOODFIN CAMP

Shifting strategic arsenals from quick-flying missiles to slow-moving bombers: A B-1B bomber

# Attention, SAC: The War's Over

It's time for America to overhaul its nuclear policy

**T**he end of the cold war should mean that the United States and the Soviet Union can begin to dismantle their nuclear arsenals. After all, Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush have agreed in principle to a strategic arms reduction treaty (START) that overall would cut U.S. long-range nuclear weapons by a quarter and the Soviets' by almost a third. So who needs such expensive new weapons as the B-2 Stealth bomber (\$530 million per plane) or more MX missiles (\$56 million each)? The superpowers should be able to take their fingers from the nuclear trigger and at the same time reap a peace dividend.

It sounds reasonably straightforward. The fact is, however, that major defense savings will have to come from conventional forces, since strategic nuclear forces account for only about 15 percent of the Pentagon budget. What is more, there is a huge gap between the political desire to cut nuclear weapons and the Pentagon's traditional responsibility for preparing for a nuclear showdown with the Soviet Union. And Bush, in the great American tradition

of please-everyone politics, has embraced both. As a result, unless the administration junks its increasingly outmoded strategy for deterring nuclear war, the START treaty will have the perverse effect of requiring the United States to spend *more* money on its nuclear arsenal, not less.

Upon taking office, every president since John F. Kennedy has been shown a large spreadsheet called the Strategic Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP). The SIOP is a matrix of Soviet (and Eastern European) targets overlaid by the number and type of weapons necessary to wipe them out. Next to each targeting option is a little box that includes estimates of the number of civilian casualties—from a few thousand to more than a hundred million. Every president who sees this prescription for doomsday, says former Defense secretary Rob-

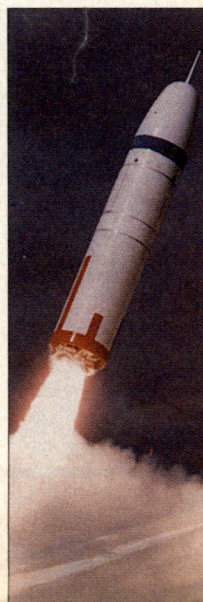
**Doomsday:** Trident II missile

ert McNamara, "is horrified, appalled." According to one of his nuclear advisers, President Reagan was so shaken that he began to imagine the fantasy of Star Wars—a space shield that would render nuclear weapons obsolete.

The nuclear-war fighting document that President Bush signed off on last year—SIOP-6G—is the culmination of efforts by his predecessors to achieve a laudable if perhaps wishful goal: to make nuclear war survivable. Instead of striking at Soviet cities, U.S. missiles and bombers are targeted primarily at Soviet nuclear and conventional forces (counterforce, in the jargon of war planners) and increasingly at the hideaways of Soviet leaders (counterleadership). Over the years, however, U.S. satellites have found more and more possible targets—from 4,000 in 1960 to 50,000 today. In its effort to contain nuclear war, the modern SIOP has become a blueprint for making the rubble bounce. On first seeing

a map of Soviet targets last year, a senior Bush administration official gasped, "There were so many pins in Moscow you couldn't even see the outline of the place on the map."

**Balance of terror:** The START treaty now being negotiated in Geneva aims to stabilize the balance of terror by shifting strategic arsenals from quick-flying missiles that cannot be recalled to slow-moving bombers that can. Bombers already play an increasingly important role: with the Soviets deploying more and more mobile missiles, the Pentagon insists that it needs ever-more sophisticated





manned aircraft to hunt them down, since land-based U.S. missiles can hit only fixed targets. At the START talks Washington tried to ban mobile missiles, but the Soviets refused, and U.S. negotiators backed off.

That leaves the United States in a quandary. The problem is that the old bombers in the U.S. arsenal—the B-52s and FB-111s—are all but obsolete, unable to penetrate the Soviets' heavily defended airspace. The Pentagon has 97 B-1Bs and now wants 132 new B-2s by the late 1990s, but Congress is balking at a strategic modernization program that could consume as much as \$150 billion over the next decade. In testimony before the House Armed Services Committee this week, Gen. John Chain, chief of Strategic Air Command, will warn Congress that unless it pays for more modern bombers, the Joint Chiefs of Staff will oppose the START treaty because the Pentagon will be unable to meet

the overwhelming demands of SIOP-6G.

Generals who warn that they can't fight without more modern weapons need to be regarded skeptically. Consider the tale of the MX missile. In the early 1980s the Navy designed a new submarine-launched missile—the Trident II—that would be so accurate it could knock out a reinforced Soviet missile silo. The Trident II was not just a threat to the Soviets, however. The U.S. Air Force worried that the Trident II would undermine the need for its own land-based missile, the MX. In the Pentagon, Air Force officers among the target planners labored for a solution. The answer: redefine how much damage it would take to knock out a Soviet silo. Not one warhead but two! Thus the Pentagon was able to insist on both the Trident II and the MX.

Are all these new weapons really necessary? Many experts believe not. John Steinbruner of the Brookings Institution argues

that both sides could achieve a level of "minimum deterrence" with 3,000-plus warheads each, down from the current levels of around 10,000 warheads. Richard Perle, an assistant secretary of Defense under Reagan, argues that the Bush administration should scrap START, which he calls "absurd" because it locks in warhead levels set by Reagan and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev back in 1982 "in some of the most intense moments of the cold war." He would cut START levels in half.

In theory, the SIOP is under civilian control, but, in fact, few civilians are allowed to see the document, and it's doubtful that the president takes the time to really understand it. Perhaps, as the Pentagon begins to draft SIOP-7 and Congress confronts the cost of modernizing the nuclear arsenal, the president would do well to study the strange rules of Armageddon—and change them.

JOHN BARRY in Washington

## The Thawing of the Freeze Movement



ALLAN TANNENBAUM—SYGMA

**Staving off the ice age:** Anti-nuke demonstrators in New York

In the fat days of the early 1980s, fund raisers for the nuclear freeze movement could haul in generous sums by warning, "Pay up or blow up." To many anxious Americans, it was more than a glib one-liner. Ronald Reagan, who joked about beginning World War III ("We begin bombing in five minutes"), was mounting an unprecedented arms buildup. By 1984 organizers could claim more than a million active members. But as *perestroika* flowered and the likelihood of su-

perpower conflict dwindled, the freeze movement suddenly found itself trying to stave off an ice age. Groups like SANE/Freeze are retrenching as members gravitate to environmentalism or other causes. "The peace community has been buffeted by good news for three years now," says John Tirman, editor of *Nuclear Times*, a movement bimonthly that shut down for six months last year before returning as a quarterly. "Fear is a better motivator than hope."

Peace activists argue that it's no time to relax. Billions still flow to the MX missile, the B-2 bomber and the Strategic Defense Initiative; production and deployment of nuclear weapons remain environmental hazards. "The weapons are still there," says Richard Healy, East Coast director of the Ploughshares Fund, a peace group. "Nobody took them away." But the exit of Reagan-era hard-liners has created a dearth of high-profile antagonists which makes it difficult to galvanize a mass movement. "It was easier for us to raise funds when we had... Caspar Weinberger as secretary of Defense," says John Isaacs of the Council for a Liveable World.

Some of the movement's wounds are self-inflicted. The 1987 merger of SANE, founded 32 years ago, and the younger Freeze was "politically brilliant but a financial disaster," says the Rev. William Sloane Coffin, SANE/Freeze president. Merging two hierarchies inflated costs; in 1988 staff was laid off. (The group's financial situation has since improved.) Young baby boomers who cut their teeth on the movement chafed as older Vietnam-era

organizers held the top jobs.

While national lobbying groups like SANE/Freeze try to adjust, local peace activists are focusing on the environmental consequences of the nuclear arsenal. In Nevada, Citizens Alert has led a fight to keep the Department of Energy from building a nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain. Plans for a new nuclear weapons plant in Idaho have met with heavy resistance from the Snake River Alliance. Many activists believe the moment is ripe for redirecting the movement into new economic debates. "Why are we spending \$150 billion to protect Western Europeans from East German shoppers?" Coffin asks. A good question, but not one likely to rekindle a mass movement. Nor will next week's announcement from the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, which is expected to set its doomsday clock—now at six minutes before midnight—back again for the second time in three years. For the movement, it's another sign that the days of agenda-setting prominence will be tough to retrieve. But for everyone, even the most hardened freezers, it's certainly good news.

BILL TURQUE with  
DANIEL GLICK in Washington